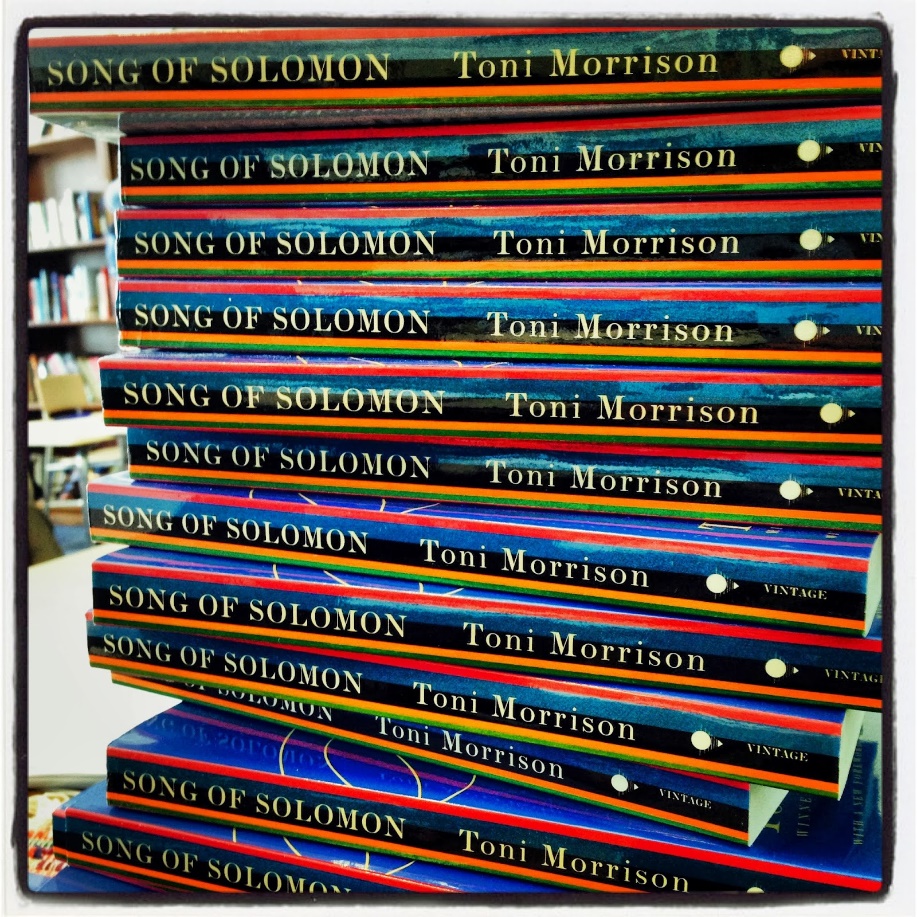
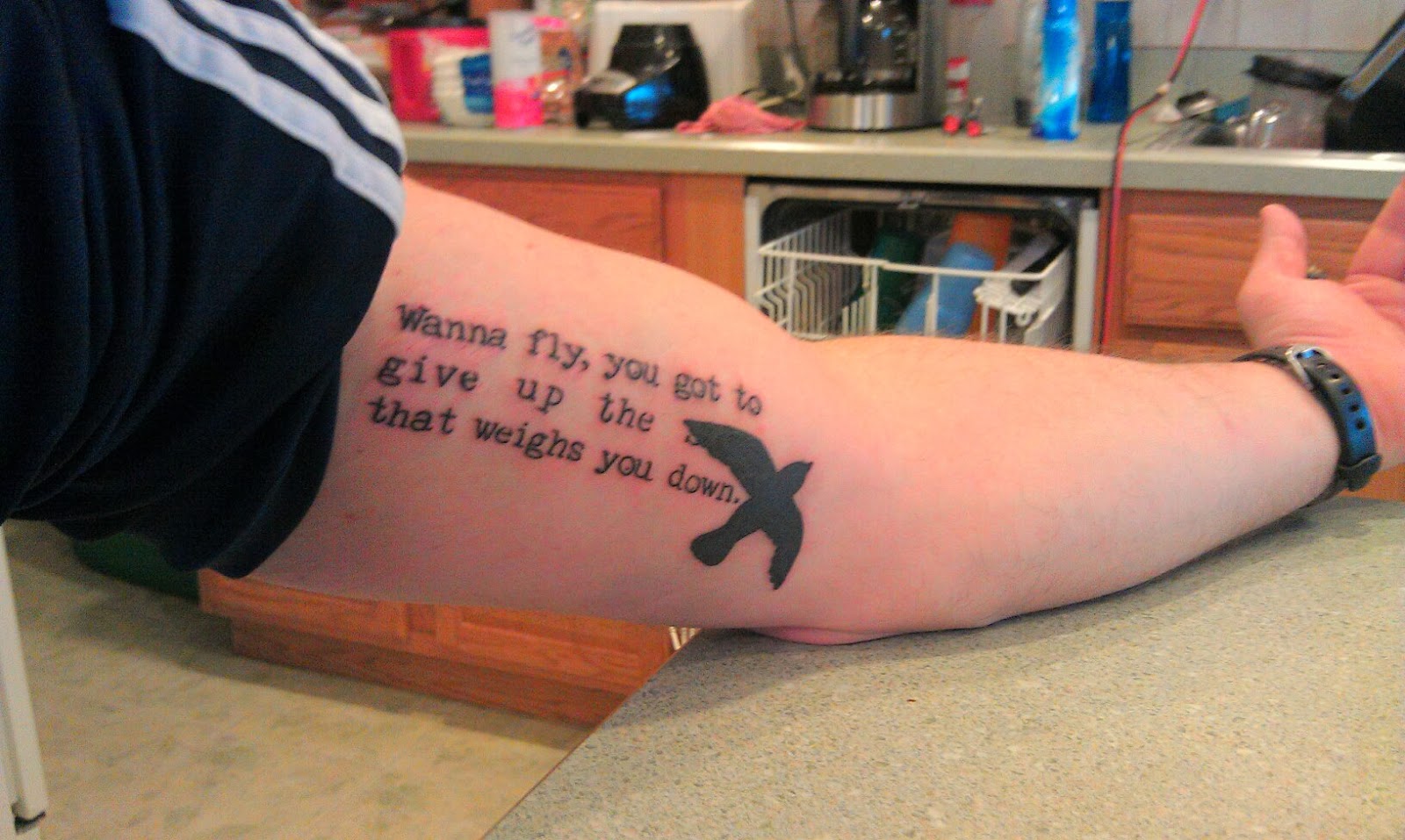
[On Teaching Song of Solomon...](http://epiphanyinbmore.blogspot.com/2014/01/on-teaching-song-of-solomon-again.html) [Miazga ?]

[](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-X56lWDNEA7w/UufiWbmbxkI/AAAAAAAAA-g/KGEA1qos0lg/s1600/photo+(1).JPG)

Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* is my favorite novel to teach, and I began teaching it again this week. It’s a book that I think everyone should read, and such a rich teach; on its surface, it’s an adventure story and a mystery with colorful characters, and, below the surface, it’s a novel with so many layers that it could be challenging for graduate English students. Students can approach it with the levels they can devote to it, which is why it’s such a compelling novel to teach.  
  
When I first started reading and teaching it, I was just under 30 and, like Milkman, still trying to find my place in the world. In the *Bildungsroman* of my life, the book spoke to me. In the last few years, though, it speaks to me in different ways. As Guitar tells Milkman about halfway through the novel -- as the two friends are looking at a peacock who can’t fly because of all its feathers “like vanity” -- I’ve given up the shit that weighed me down. Only when you give up the shit that weighs you down can you “fly”. It wasn’t vanity that weighed me down, but I’ve been weighed down a bit in my 30s and it’s nice to say that I’m flying now and couldn’t be happier. The line and the book mean so much to me that I got this tattoo last spring: 

[](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-mdKz2FXdKJA/UufkI3us7yI/AAAAAAAAA-s/6qXhe_8obVQ/s1600/tattoo.jpg)

I’m going to have to give *Song of Solomon* a year rest some year to freshen up my perspective of it; I thought hard this year about replacing it with Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House*, since our students haven’t read a Native American author in their time at our school. But they also haven’t read Morrison, and I just think that in 300 years, it’s going to be Morrison that is studied in high school classrooms more than any other from the last century of American Literature. Steinbeck and Faulkner too, of course, and maybe a few more.  
  
It’s not this year, though. I’m sticking with *Song of Solomon,* as I’m teaching two other novels for the first time -- Adichie’s *Americanah* and Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*. So I stuck with Morrison, and teaching her stuff again still charges my senses. Especially this book, which is just so rich and dense.  
  
I’m trying to prepare students for their Paper 2 IB English exam, which is my favorite assessment in IB. It asks students to answer an essay question and compare any two works of fiction they’ve read. IB suggests that teachers choose different types of novels for this exercise, so their minds are on different structures and techniques that writers use to create meaning. I think I have this year, using Nigerian and Australian novelists along with two U.S. novelists, all who use different structures and techniques.  
  
Last year, students could choose from any of these three questions:

**Prose: novel and short story**

1.      Though plot may be said, at its simplest level, to be a sequence of events, what truly distinguishes prose fiction is the use of narrative disruption: impediment, detour, diversion, or digression. In at least two works in you study, how have writers created narrative disruption and to what effect?

2.      “Successful characterization involves taking the reader to the heart, to the inner core, of an imagined person.” In at least two works in your study, discuss by what means and with what degree of success authors have tried to “take you to the heart” of their characters.

9.    A moral or a lesson is a common convention in stories. In what ways and for what purposes have at least two of your chosen authors either adhered to or subverted this convention?

Most students answered #8, but I think #7 is the most interesting -- a question about subplots. Regardless, students will have to answer a question like this, but they will not have an idea about what it might be, and I won’t either. So I have to think about ways books juxtapose against each other in my planning of the curriculum.

This year, I’m pretty intrigued by this quotation I read of Morrison’s, especially in a novelistic world where it seems like we read novels of the “Black Experience” or “Immigrant Experience”. I’m most interested in ideas that can bring people together -- I’m a believer that literature can unite and humanize people from different cultures. From the time I read Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* in the summer before my freshman year of college, the idea of making something that seems so personal and specific and making it feel universal has always been what I found most powerful about art.  
  
With this in mind, this quote from Morrison really grabbed my attention: ”I felt that nobody wrote about those black people the way I knew those people to be. And I was aware of that fact, that it was rare. Aware that there was an enormous amount of apology going on, even in the best writing. But more important than that, there was so much explanation…the black writers always explained something to somebody else. And I didn’t want to explain anything to anybody else! …If I could understand Emily Dickinson—you know, she wasn’t writing for a black audience or a white audience; she was writing whatever she wrote! I think if you do that, if you hone in on what you write, it will be universal…not the other way around!”

This is so interesting to me: How *can* a novel address issues of race and gender and also be universal? This is one of the questions I’m having my students delve into with the novel. For me, a white man, the book speaks to me in ways that I can’t even express. I know it’s universal. But how does Morrison accomplish this? I’m going to delve into this with my students and am pretty excited.

This is the rest of my unit plan, and the 6 questions the students will focus on, plus the questions they have to choose from to write about, comparing *Song of Solomon* to Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet*, another novel in our study.

**IB English IV**

***Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison, born Feb. 18, 1931 (check date on first page of novel), is generally considered one of the greatest U.S. writers of the 20th century. She is the last U.S. writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, which she won in 1993.

*Song of Solomon* won the National Book Award in 1977.

Themes heavily embedded in Greek and West African mythology, as well as the questing archetype, while the title comes directly from a book in the Bible.

Other novels: *Beloved* (1987, named best American novel of the last 25 years by *The New York Times*), *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012).

With *Song* we focus on the following six questions. You, along with your group assigned below, are responsible for tracking the area you have been assigned, either through textmarking or a separate sheet of paper of 25-40 examples (yes, text-marking for the question should be easier). At the end of the reading of the novel, your group will present to the class your findings.

**1)**     **“The journey” or “the quest” is a common literary archetype. How does this novel reflect or refute this stereotypical archetype?**

Include: all journeys for all characters, both physical and mental; Greek allusions (Circe) draw from the idea of the journey, too. There are some interesting examples of backwards journeys as well; make sure you annotate as you go.

2)     **Intertextuality is the shaping of text meaning by another text, and fiction writers often engage in in this practice to add meaning to their fiction. How does the author do so in this novel?**

Include: references to Bible, Greek, and African mythology, and any other. (Those three must be covered in all manifestations.)

3)     **Minor characters often have great significance in a complex work of literature. How do the minor characters in this text add meaning and insight into the novel’s themes?**

Include: All minor characters, with specific focus on several you find especially interesting from various parts of novel.

4)     **The concept of “Home” is one explored throughout fiction. How does the novel develop this concept?**

Include: home not just in the physical “house” sense but homeland and movement towards.

**5)**     **Love is a universal human emotion often explored in fiction. How does the novel cultivate the emotions of love (of self, of a lover, of people, of the world, of culture) and redemption?**

Include: Right from title alluding to the biblical book most explicitly about love, and the first chapter, when a drunken character screams that he can handle the hate, but not the love, Morrison sets her novel up as a novel about love. Track this idea, coupled with mercy and redemption as well.

**6)**     **Toni Morrison once said, “I felt that nobody wrote about those black people the way I knew those people to be. And I was aware of that fact, that it was rare. Aware that there was an enormous amount of apology going on, even in the best writing. But more important than that, there was so much explanation…the black writers always explained something to somebody else. And I didn’t want to explain anything to anybody else! …If I could understand Emily Dickinson—you know, she wasn’t writing for a black audience or a white audience; she was writing whatever she wrote! I think if you do that, if you hone in on what you write, it will be universal…not the other way around!” In what ways can a novel “hone in” on issues of race and gender but also be universal?**

There is a continuing concern with issues of gender (especially abandoned women) and race/racism (look for mentions of “whiteness”, for example.

**Final Essay: Comparing *Song of Solomon* with *Cloudstreet***

A.     Compare how two different writers in your study have used the supernatural in their fiction.

B.      Economic disparity – clashes between the “haves” and the “have-nots” – are often the basis of fictional writing. How is this conflict showcased in the works of fiction you have read in your study?

C.     Often in fiction, the opening of novels – including epigraphs and titles – introduce themes that are developed later and come to fruition by the end. Describe how two novels in your study have done this.

*Song of Solomon* Schedule

I ask picky questions and expect the book to be read closely.

**For each chapter, memorize a key quotation or line/piece of textual evidence. You’ll need it for your quizzes. Keep them memorized for the entire unit and beyond. This will help on your Paper 2 exam.**

**For each chapter, take annotative notes on the structure and characters.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mon 1/27 | Tues 1/28 | Wed 1/29  Introduce novel and assessments | Thurs 1/30  Activity/Discussion: Chapter 1 | Fri 1/31  **No School: PD Day** | 2/1 – 2/2  Wikispaces discussion |
| Mon 2/3  Reflections about revision so far of WA | Tues 2/4  Quiz Ch. 1-4 | Wed 2/5  Commentary Practice | Thurs 2/6  Activity/Discussion: Chapter 2-5 | Fri 2/7 | 2/8 – 2/9  Wikispaces discussion |
| Mon 2/10 | Tues 2/11  Quiz Ch. 5-9 | Wed 2/12  Commentary Practice | Thurs 2/13  Activity/Discussion: Part I | Fri 2/14  WA due with cover sheets | 2/15 – 2/16  Wikispaces discussion |
| Mon 2/17  **No School: Presidents’ Day** | Tues 2/18  Quiz Ch. 10-end | Wed 2/19  Discussion: Part II | Thurs 2/20  Prep for presentations | Fri 2/21  Presentations | 2/22 – 2/23  Wikispaces discussion |
| Mon 2/24  Presentations / Begin Reviewing and Re-reading *Cloudstreet* | Tues 2/25  TDQs for *Cloudstreet* | Wed 2/26  Reviewing *Cloudstreet &* Essay development | Thurs 2/27 | Fri 2/28 |  |
| Mon 3/3  *Cloudstreet* / *Song of Solomon* essay due | Tues 3/4  Begin *Cannery Row* |  |  |  |  |

Approximate Dates of rest of novels:

*Cannery Row* by John Steinbeck March 3 – March 24

*Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie: March 25 – April 25

IB Exams Begin on Monday, May 5th. You’ll take your Paper 1 (Commentary) on May 5th and your Paper 2 (Essay Question) on May 6th.

Posted 28th January 2014 by [epiphanyinbmore](http://www.blogger.com/profile/04112084772701911008)

Labels: [ib english](http://epiphanyinbmore.blogspot.com/search/label/ib%20english) [Song of Solomon](http://epiphanyinbmore.blogspot.com/search/label/Song%20of%20Solomon) [Toni Morrison](http://epiphanyinbmore.blogspot.com/search/label/Toni%20Morrison)

<http://epiphanyinbmore.blogspot.com/2014/01/on-teaching-song-of-solomon-again.html>

Wednesday June 10, 2020